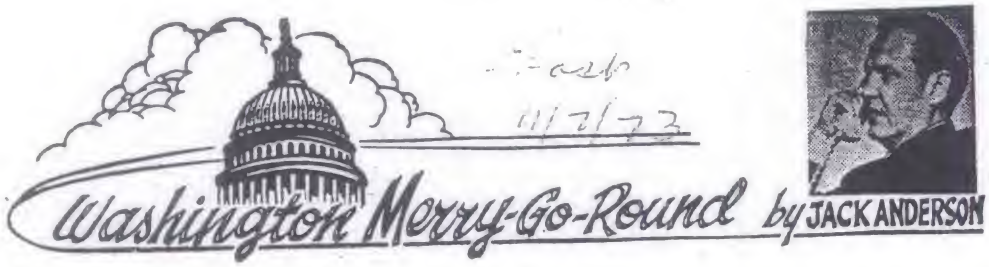

Cash
11/21/73

WASHINGTON — The federal government, believe it or not, is America's biggest opium trafficker. The authorities are quietly planning to unload hundreds of tons of the addictive drug from the secret hiding places beside the gold at Fort Knox and elsewhere.

Actually, the government opium peddling is all on the up and up. Besides being the source of the killer drug heroin, opium is also refined into the useful pain-killers morphine and codeine. The United States began building up an opium stockpile after World War II.

At the beginning of this year, there were 634 tons of opium in the stockpile, mostly refined into opium gum, morphine sulphate and codeine. Simultaneously, a bad opium crop in India created a codeine and morphine shortage.

Thus, the United States decided a good deal of the federal opium stash could be sold off for medical purposes and Congress is now considering approval of the sale to private industry.

Meanwhile according to classified information from the Justice Department, the opium is under 24-hour guard at Fort Knox (its derivatives are worth more than gold), at West Point (well away from any curious cadets) and at a naval supply depot in New Jersey, among other sites.

The precautions by the federal government are wise: A huge heroin cache in the custody of the New York police was recently stolen from under their noses by big-league drug traffickers.

BEBE'S BRIDGE: Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo, President Nixon's best friend, is planning to develop an island near Key Biscayne that has long been a point of controversy.

The teardrop-shaped island, called Fisher's, is located between the southern tip of Miami Beach and Virginia Key, an adjunct to key Biscayne. For years, Rebozo and other Fisher's Island, Inc., stockholders have sought construction of a causeway to provide access to their property. Each attempt has been blocked by angry citizens.

We have now learned, however, that Rebozo and his fellow investors have commissioned an architectural firm to draw up plans for an urban community on Fisher's.

Under the directions given Simonds and Simonds, Pittsburgh architects who specialize in environmental design, the island will have no circulating vehicles other than buses and golf carts.

John Simonds of the firm admitted to us that, at Rebozo's orders, the planning is well under way and a preliminary rendering will be completed by the end of the year.

The few people who work on the island were surprised when we asked them about development of the sandspit, which is largely covered with pine. Since local authorities have been reluctant to build the causeway to the island, the success of the venture thus may depend on whether the Nixon administration lends the Rebozo group a federal helping hand with the causeway construction.

NIXON BUGGED: President Nixon, the nation's most famous recorder of private conversations, was himself secretly recorded by a California editor two years ago in an embarrassing conversation.

At the time, Interior Secretary Rogers Morton had announced proudly that he personally had decided to ban two new oil rigs from the pollution-plagued Santa Barbara channel. Under federal court decisions, it is the interior secretary, and no one else, who can decide on such bans.

But at a press reception, Santa Barbara News-Press editor Paul Veblen began to question Nixon searchingly about who really ordered the ban on the rig platforms. Nixon, astonishingly, claimed he, not Morton, did it. Unknown to the President, Veblen's pocket tape recorder was producing this verbatim record of Nixon's admission:

"Oh, we had him (Morton) make the announcement. But I made the decision. I made the decision. But he made the announcement. (In a lower voice) You know, really, they take a lot of heat. So I told Morton, I told him, I said, Rog, you go out there and make the announcement. But I, of course, made the decision, (Nixon chuckles). But give him the credit."

Morton got the credit, but now Nixon is getting the headaches. The big oil companies are trying to show the Morton decree was illegal, in part because Nixon, not Morton, really ordered it. And the tape could become a vital part of their arguments.